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ABSTRACT

The mission of Save the Children--Scotland is to build a better world for children by building a movement for children's rights, making links between children's lives and policy development, and supporting children and young people to be activists in their own communities. Twenty-two mothers and two fathers attended a seminar of Save the Children's Positive Parenting Project and expressed their views regarding their parenting experiences, expectations of parents, and how they could be better supported in their role. Parents met in groups of six to discuss the issues; their discussions were taped and transcribed. The discussions indicated that parents believed they had numerous responsibilities that had to be balanced with responsibilities and obligations of employment, including providing adequate physical care, teaching values, providing encouragement, and being up-to-date with child care and child development. Parents felt that pressures to meet their responsibilities came from society, older people, professionals, the parents themselves, government, and schools. They noted the importance of a consistent child rearing approach, the need to support mothers, the advantages of having extended family support, and the need for public transportation. Parents identified support needs in five categories: emotional support, practical support, child care, information, and advice. A model for support endorsed by the majority of parents would be built on meeting information needs, emphasizing existing skills, using parent groups rather than parenting classes, developing an informal structure for support, defining the agenda, addressing different learning styles, and enabling discussion and interaction. (KB)

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The mission of Save the Children worldwide is to build a better world for children, and in Scotland we do this through a programme which has three interconnected strands.

1

Building a movement for children's rights

We work together with a wide range of other organisations to promote the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We encourage all who have a responsibility for children's wellbeing to adopt the principles set out in the Convention and put them into practice.

2

Making the links between children's lives and policy development

We research and highlight the way many areas of public policy have an impact on children's wellbeing, such as links between environment and health, low income and diet etc. We champion the cause of children who face discrimination and exclusion.

3

Supporting children and young people to be activists in their own communities

We work in partnership projects with children and young people, local groups and service providers to create opportunities for children and young people to be involved in their communities as full participants.

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SAVE THE CHILDREN SCOTLAND

POSITIVE PARENTING PROJECT

Parents Seminar 24th March 1998

Trefoil House
Edinburgh

ELIZABETH CUTTING

Acknowledgments

Save the Children would like to thank the parents and children who made such a tremendous effort to attend the seminar. Their enthusiastic participation and contribution made for an enjoyable and successful day and provided a vivid reminder of the almost limitless levels of dedication, care, patience, love and concern which parents have for their children; despite the many difficulties they may encounter along the way.

I would also like to thank Susan Elsley for doing an excellent job as chair for the day and Marion Currie for organising the event and ensuring that everything went smoothly. My thanks also to Sarah Nelson, Sue Robertson and Eldon Zuill for agreeing to sit on the panel and supporting this unique event and to all the Project workers who helped to co-ordinate and plan the day.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the generous support provided by the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS) in meeting the production costs of this report.

Elizabeth Cutting
National Co-ordinator
Positive Parenting Project

On the 24th of March 1998 Save the Children Scotland's Positive Parenting Project invited a number of parents and children to a seminar at Trefoil House in Edinburgh. The purpose of the day was to get parents together to share and discuss their experiences of parenting, their thoughts on what is expected of them as parents and how they think they could be better supported in their role. In short, we wanted to give these parents a voice, encourage them to discuss contemporary parenting and explore with them the increasing tendency for society to blame them when children's and young peoples' lives go wrong.

It is essential for parents to have the opportunity to express their views and opinions and that these are brought to the attention of those with a responsibility for ensuring that parents and families receive the support they need in the important task of raising children.

This report is a summary of parents' views from the seminar. The direct quotes featured throughout provide a vivid insight into how these parents feel.

- The views expressed in this report represent those of the parents who attended the seminar and not necessarily those of the organisations involved

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Background

In June 1996 the Scottish Programme of Save the Children Fund (SCF) was awarded a grant from the National Lottery Charities Board to fund a new initiative, the Positive Parenting Project, under the Low Income Theme of the second round of lottery grants. The grant was for a three year period and work commenced in January 1997.

The Project proposal was originally developed by SCF in response to two perceived demands; the increasing levels of poverty that children and families are experiencing in Scotland and the need for all parents to be able to access appropriate support, services and information in their roles as parents. Under Article 18 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, States Parties are obliged to render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and to ensure the development of facilities and services for the care of children. For this reason supporting parents is an important children's rights issue.

The Positive Parenting Project has been actively involved with a large number of parents and other organisations working with families across Scotland since the beginning of 1997. As our Project bases are fairly geographically spread out, there are few opportunities for contact between parents across the Project. We knew from talking to parents that they find it very helpful to meet other parents, so we felt it would be constructive to invite people from across the Project to come together for a one day seminar.

We wanted a venue in which parents and children would feel welcome and Trefoil House on the outskirts of Edinburgh proved to be an excellent choice. The House stands on twenty acres of parkland, six miles from the centre of Edinburgh. It has recently been extensively renovated and was able to provide a large sunny room to accommodate everyone, a number of smaller rooms for workshops and an excellent soft play area for children. In addition, the children were also free to play in the outdoor play area and parents took advantage of some unexpected sunshine to explore the grounds of the House during lunch.

To set the scene for the day we displayed a large number of newspaper story headings in which parenting had been the main focus of discussion. Some of these were humorous, while others struck

a more serious note. These headings were copied, enlarged and displayed along the corridors and in the rooms being occupied for the seminar. We invited parents to add their comments to these displays and both the headings and the comments which they evoked are featured throughout this report.

Who Attended the Seminar

In all twenty four parents joined us at Trefoil House, bringing with them twenty one children ranging in age from four months to four years. These parents came from Kirriemuir and Montrose in Angus, Greater Pilton and Niddrie in Edinburgh, Royston in Glasgow and Blackburn in West Lothian. Twenty two mums and two dads arrived shortly after 10.00am and once the children were settled into the creche the seminar began.

The Day's Events

Susan Elsley, the Assistant Programme Director for Save the Children in Scotland welcomed everyone to the Seminar and outlined the day's agenda.

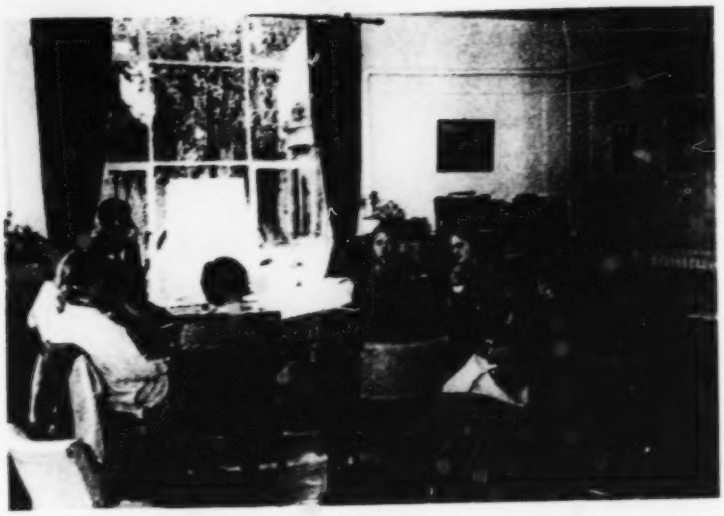
This was followed by a short talk given by Elizabeth Cutting the Positive Parenting Project Co-Ordinator which helped to set the tone for the day by looking at the wide range of skills required if a job description were to be drawn up for the job of parent. It outlined the enormous responsibilities that are involved and how the role has become even more complex and demanding in the '90s.

After the initial introductions and short talk, parents and project workers split into four workshop to ensure that parents were given the maximum opportunity to discuss the issues and voice their opinions. These workshops were taped and transcribed, and provided a vivid insight in to how parents feel about their parenting role and the ways in which they deal with the expectations and demands they face.

Each workshop addressed the same questions but in a different order to ensure that each issue was covered by a group. The questions we addressed were:

- What do you think is expected of parents and who expects this?
- How can parents meet these expectations?
- What type of support do parents need?

The sessions were also used to identify a couple of key questions which parents would like to put to the afternoon panel. The panel members included Sarah Nelson of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, Sue Robertson, Director of One Parent Families Scotland and Eldon Zuill, Programme Officer at the Health Education Board for Scotland.



What Parents Said

When we asked parents what was expected of them we received a broad range of responses.

On the practical side, they are responsible for ensuring that their children are adequately fed, clothed and cared for, with their abilities as a parent often being judged by others on how their children appear physically.

In addition to these practical concerns they are responsible for:

- health - both in terms of ensuring a healthy and safe environment for their children and in terms of health care and providing a healthy diet

- making sure that children are brought up with the correct values and understand the differences between right and wrong. Parents have a responsibility to set a good example to their children and to be positive role models

- providing encouragement to develop their child's full potential and allowing them the freedom to express themselves

- providing the necessary care, vigilance and support which children need
- developing mutual trust and a positive ongoing relationship with their child
- coping effectively with all the crises, dilemmas and tensions in relation to raising a child
- providing a stable environment and meeting the diverse needs of each individual child
- being fully aware and up to date with child care and child development, from birth to the teenage years
- helping children with school work and other educational issues

And in addition being nurse, cook, referee, mediator, counsellor and taxi driver as well as ensuring that laundry and other domestic chores are up to date.

Parents pointed out that for some, the difficulties in meeting the above responsibilities have to be balanced with the responsibilities and obligations of employment. Many find that these concurrent demands place a great deal of strain on them, making the need for some form of support even greater.

Who Expects All This ?

The parents we spoke to felt that the pressures on them to meet their responsibilities come from a broad range of sources.

Society

Society places enormous expectations on parents, requiring that they produce well behaved and morally upright citizens. In addition, children themselves have expectations of how parents should behave towards them and expect to be disciplined because it is all part of what being a good parent entails.

"People judge you on how you handle your child, but what is the right way or the wrong way"

Older People

Grandmothers in particular, are very influential in setting standards for parenting and in general the previous generation can be very judgmental, especially in relation to discipline. This generation often has a different attitude to children, expecting them to be 'seen and not heard' and any interference or comments can result in increased tension. Given that parents are now encouraged to listen more to their children and to involve them in decision making, this can lead to discord with other family members who may have a different attitude towards child rearing.

"Society should accept that there is no such thing as the perfect child".

Professionals

Authority figures, such as health visitors, doctors and teachers also place expectations on parents. However, parents emphasised that if a positive relationship exists or can be developed with professionals, they are more likely to welcome any advice or information, take their views onboard and be more likely to initiate an approach.

"Every individual parent has a different view on how to bring up their kids within themselves and whether they feel that it is right for their kids or not. So how could someone come along and tell you are wrong when you feel it is right".

Parents

The parents themselves have high expectations of their roles and responsibilities and are often their own worst critics. They also have expectations on behalf of their children and want to secure the best they can for them. While the current political climate may appear to endorse extra support, many of the parents we spoke to say that it sends out mixed messages which both confuse and anger them.

"I think the Government is blaming parents for everything, but it is not all their fault".

Parents are the first to be blamed when things go wrong and the last to be acknowledged when things go well. They are targeted as the source of a range of social problems ranging from truancy to crime and public disorder offences. However, the concurrent pressures placed on them to go out to work, yet still ensure that their children are well cared for and under their control twenty four hours a day, is unrealistic and unfair. Many parents involved with the Positive Parenting Project have to secure employment due to financial pressures; but this then forces them to become reliant on others to care for their children. Some parents would like to have the choice to stay at home to care for their own children and to avoid becoming dependent on others.

"And telling young parents to get back to work ...It's no that easy to get into another job....and maybe you want the basic choice of staying at home".

Government

Many mothers indicated that they are currently under a lot of pressure and that the messages they are receiving are not clear or helpful. In the past they feel they have been labelled 'bad mothers' for going out to work and leaving their children in the care of others. On the other hand not working and staying at home to care for children, whilst claiming benefits, also leads to criticism. Mothers are now even more confused by current policy which is encouraging them to return to the workplace, but continues to blame them when their children truant or misbehave.

"One minute they are telling you one thing and the next minute they are telling you something else".

Good or Bad Parents ?

The mixed messages parents receive prompted an important question which clearly struck a cord.

'Who decides what makes a parent good or bad ?'.

Parents are responsible for ensuring that the physical, emotional and social needs of their children are met. They consider this to be part of being a 'good parent'. But financially supporting your family is also important. When parents have to work long hours to provide this, it is not always possible to be physically present to supervise children especially if they are older.

"If they send you out to work how do you know if your child is playing truant"

Sometimes in these circumstances parents can find themselves labelled a 'bad parent' if their children get into trouble. Hence these labels appear divisive as the concept of a 'good' or 'bad' parent is randomly assigned, depending on ones view of parenting and parental responsibility.

"So whichever choice you make in one sense you could be judged a bad parent".

Public Spending

Cuts in public spending in relation to families and children, escalating prices in relation to staple foods and essentials and the withdrawal of hot school meals in some areas, further undermines the confidence of many parents in the current political commitment to supporting them. The issue of school meals raised a great deal of concern. Any moves to have this essential resource withdrawn leads parents to believe that there is a lack of awareness on how essential this is to many families.

"They need a hot school meal, especially in the winter"

For parents experiencing poverty or disadvantage, with perhaps a number of children to feed, the expense of providing a nutritious well balanced meal each evening would be prohibitive. Many parents can only afford to provide sandwiches in the evening and rely on the provision of hot school meals to help ensure their children's health and well being.

Schools

Parents are expected to be actively involved with their children's education and to provide support with homework etc in addition to running a home and performing a range of domestic tasks. Being expected to deal with a broad range of educational issues and be fully conversant with what appears to be an ever changing curriculum, leaves many feeling overwhelmed by the education system. They would like more information on schools and the curriculum in order to be able to help their children and acquire a better understanding of the issues.

"I think the Government's approach keeps changing. I have three children and I have not had parallel routes through the education system with any one of them".

However, some of the parents we spoke to reported having a very positive relationship with schools. Some schools readily provide information for low income families concerning grant applications and free school meals etc. First time mums in this situation find it particularly helpful to have this information and some parents receive a monthly newsletter, providing information about events, school holiday, school trips etc.

"The teachers are good, they are quite involved".

What Do Parents Find Helpful ?

In terms of meeting expectations, parents pointed out that it is important to have a consistent approach to bringing up children with other adults in the home or family, particularly partners. Partners play a very important role in that respect and when they are willing to help with childcare and give mothers a break, they can alleviate some of the pressures which many women face.

"Someone to give you backup in any decisions and offer you advice...moral support really".

Supporting Mums

The mothers we spoke to find that they are constantly required to tend to a range of needs within the home, both in relation to children and adults. The often conflicting demands and expectations of each individual places a great deal of pressure on them. While they generally deal with it as best they can, many indicated that their partners do not appear to be aware of, or subjected to, these pressures in the same way as women are. Thus women find that these demands fall mainly on their shoulders and that it is increasingly important for mothers to 'take care' of themselves and be given opportunities to take time out.

"You need time to yourself...mine is seventeen and I am still waiting for the social life bit".

Extended Family Support

In the past women did not work outside the home as extensively as they do now, which meant that more mothers and grandmothers were more available to offer help to younger parents. The parents groups pointed to the many advantages of having extended family around to help with child rearing and to offer support.

"You need support from your family...that's important".

Public Transport

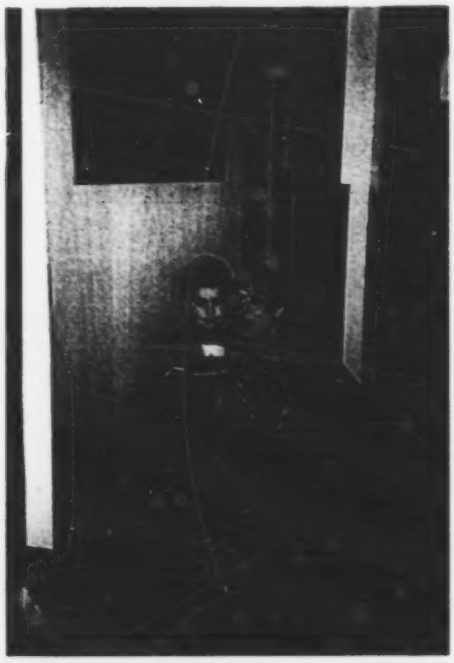
Shopping presents parents with many problems as they try to negotiate large supermarkets with small children. Using public transport can also be very difficult when you have young children and prams or buggies as well as shopping bags. Making these facilities more family friendly would help many parents.

"We want places to be a lot more family friendly".

Doing Your Best

Given that parents are under increasing pressure from a wide range of sources to be even more responsible towards their children, they are very realistic about what can and cannot be achieved. The parents we spoke to acknowledge that they do not always get it right, but pointed out there is no such thing as the 'perfect child' or the 'perfect parent' and that today parenting takes place in a wide range of different circumstances and situations.

"Every parent has the right to meet their own individual requirements...you can only do your best".



What Type of Support Do Parents Need Now ?

All parents face difficulties and problems in the process of raising their children. The frequency and severity of these problems is the only thing that differs from one family to the next. Most of these problems are reported daily in millions of homes; so much so that they are considered to be part of

the 'normal' course of events as children develop, mature and eventually reach independence. However, for many parents going through these individual difficulties, they cannot be rationalised quite so easily which can frequently lead to increased stress and tension and contribute to family dysfunction.

The parents we spoke to unanimously agreed that not only do they need extra help and support, but that they would welcome it, if it was provided in the correct way. They had plenty of ideas about how such support should be developed and delivered.

The support needs identified by parents attending the seminar fall into five main categories: emotional, practical, childcare, information, and advice.

Emotional Support

For a lot of parents the most important form of support is to be able to meet with and talk to other parents going through similar problems and difficulties. Sharing their experiences and concerns allows parents to feel they are not alone. This emotional support offers enormous potential, especially as the extended family is not always close by, or available, to listen to and support parents. Many find themselves socially or geographically isolated with few close friends or family to turn to for support. The chance to receive support in this way is something many parents would welcome.

Groups which Offer Support

Developing support groups which give parents the chance to meet and discuss issues in a friendly and non-threatening environment is a popular option. Parents who are already involved with such groups on the Parenting Project called for them to be extended, especially for parents in rural areas who feel particularly isolated. Support groups offer the chance to take part in different activities which play a major role in reducing stress. It is important for parents to have other interests and many called for more recognition of parents' individual needs as an important part of providing support. Parents feel that too many groups revolve solely around children's needs at the expense of their needs.

Support groups also offer parents the chance to identify other parenting related needs: such as first aid for children, healthy eating on a budget, general or specific health concerns as well as child development and child care issues. Groups can then organise to have these support needs met, perhaps through health workers or other community sources and to be responsive to the needs of particular communities.

Groups not Classes

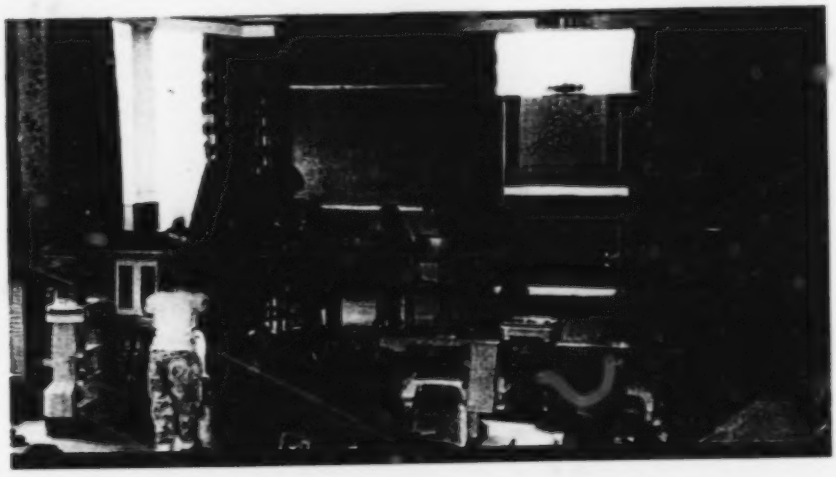
Parents unanimously rejected the concept of 'parenting classes' as they associate them with families where children have been in trouble with either the police, the school or their neighbours. They feel that they are being directed at low income families, lone parent families or the parents of 'problem' children. They are also concerned that such classes endorse a middle class perspective of parenting which is based on an 'ideal' model of how children should be raised. Many of the parents we spoke to think that such classes fail to acknowledge the wider issues which parents living in disadvantaged areas have to face and resent the concept of being told how it should be done..

"It is not just about going to learn to be a good parent it is about support. That's a huge difference you know".

"It is almost like punishing people, saying you are a bad parent so you are going to go to these classes".

The term 'class' clearly evokes the idea of a formal, set learning programme based on a set of ideas or beliefs and delivered by an authority figure who takes on the role of a 'teacher'. Parents prefer the term 'group' rather than 'class', as it conveys a less stigmatising approach.

"It depends on your age...if you have just had a baby and you really don't know what you are doing and you choose to find out more, there should not be a label on it just because you want to go and attend a parenting support group. Call it that instead of a class".



These parents also think that a 'parenting class' would not provide the range of support which they clearly want and need. They are very conscious of the enormous range of approaches each individual parent has and how, even within families, each child can have a different set of needs. Parents want support structures to acknowledge this and to offer the type of support they require.

"I've got three children and I can do the same thing with each child and each child will react differently, although I am doing the exact same thing. Children are individuals and there isn't a right or a wrong way for every child. But society does not accept that, they expect the perfect child and the perfect mother...it is not always the parent's fault when things go wrong.

Parent's think that support groups which are responsive and allow them to identify their current and future information and support needs are far more likely to succeed than 'classes' where the agenda is less flexible and there is limited acknowledgement of the wider social, economic or environmental problems which impact on families.

"One of the important ingredients in anything that is set up is that parents are very much in control of the process in defining their own problems".

Practical Support

There are a number of practical ways in which support can be improved and designed to be more effective. Parents identified health workers as an important source of practical help and assistance and in particular the role that Health Visitors played. Health Visitors offer a great deal of support and are also in a position to make parents aware of other forms of local support which they can access.

However, amongst the group there was a marked difference in how Health Visitors are perceived depending on whether you lived in an urban or rural area. In some rural areas Health Visitors are considered to be a very positive form of support. These parents have much more regular contact and are also more successful in terms of linking up with them and getting assistance or advice when it is required.

"We can get one any time we want...just a phone call. Same with the Doctor and that if your wee one is ill they take them in. They are very good".

"They come to us if you phone before 9 o'clock. They are out there, they are really active and they are involved".

The advice and reassurance they offer can mean that parents who are concerned about their child do not have to wait for an appointment with their Doctor. For parents who do not have access to transport, this service is greatly valued.

"The thing we find with us is that the Health Visitor's reassurance sometimes saves the need for a Doctor's appointment".

In Angus, the Positive Parenting Project has set up two parents groups and both are extensively supported by Health Visitors. They come along to the groups and help to arrange sessions on issues identified by parents. They are instrumental in informing parents about the groups and encouraging them to come along. Having a Health Visitor in attendance at these groups also means that parents can informally discuss any concerns they may have and receive advice or reassurance in a relaxed social setting.

"Mine's quite good if I want them, they come at any time. They come to our group meeting every Friday".

Many of the parents we spoke to from urban areas do not appear to have the same experience of support from their Health Visitors as their counterparts in the more rural areas have. In this instance contact is restricted to the periodic checks which are required at certain stages. Out-with this statutory visit, these parents do not appear to have the same type of informal access found in some rural areas. On certain days Health Visitors are available at the baby clinics, but many parents reported being unable to contact them easily at other times, especially if they need reassurance or advice.

"If you've no got any family or anything...it's just knowing that you can pick up a phone and ask for some advice".

Parents would like to be able to make contact more easily with Health Visitors in order to reduce anxiety and save unnecessary journeys to the Doctor, which often incurred a costly financial outlay. This was especially relevant to parents who did not have family close by to offer support.

"No it's very hard to get a home visit...You have to make an appointment in Glasgow and you're lucky if you get one within two or three weeks".

While parents acknowledge that Health Visitors in large cities and urban areas have far more people to see, they were envious of the type of support which some of the parents in rural areas were able to access, despite the fact that many had to cover much larger geographical areas.

"In an area where it is so remote you would think that you would get a reduced service but you are actually getting a better service...you are getting more".

"The country Health Visitors, we wish to have them in the town".

Some parents recalled particularly harrowing experiences which further underlined the importance of having access to such support when required.

"No matter how ill your child is, you've got to take them out, because I had to take my wee girl, she was dying with meningitis. You had to do that. I had to go to one hospital and they transferred me to Yorkhill, the children's hospital, but they would nae come out"

Childcare

Childcare is high on every parents' agenda and the parents at the seminar were equally vocal about the importance of having access to good quality care. Nurseries, playgroups, parent and toddler groups and childminders, offer parents the opportunity to have some time to themselves or to avail of employment or training opportunities. Having access to this resource provides a very practical form of support to parents and gives children the opportunity to participate in a variety of different play experiences. However, these parents emphasised that access must not be dependent on the ability to pay and should therefore be subsidised in some way to ensure that all parents and children can avail themselves equally of these opportunities

"Affordable child care is essential".

Safe Environments

Safe and secure environments for children is an issue which many of the parents raised. Increased traffic levels and fears for children's safety, means that parents are reticent to allow children outdoors in areas which they feel are unsafe. This led to calls for more child friendly environments which parents could confidently allow children access to. Having to keep children confined to certain areas, or in the home, can be a source of stress and conflict as children's need to explore their environment increases.

"I used to play in the street but it is different now isn't it".

"I wouldn't like J to go out on his own, for security, I wouldn't like it".

"My boy is seven and I still go out with him".

Information and Advice

For most of the parents, being able to speak to other parents is a helpful way of sharing concerns and hearing how others who have experienced similar problems coped with them. This method was identified as being the most preferred way of receiving information and advice of a general nature and informal groups where parents could go along to meet other parents was considered to be the best structure for this type of support.

"Groups like this, support groups... but low-key type of things, informal".

"Advice from other parents...I think that is the most important one, and just listening to other people talking and finding out how they went about things".

In terms of getting more specific advice or information on particular issues, parents want it to be much more accessible and relevant. Many are particularly concerned about the recent scares in relation to the MMR cocktail of inoculations which children receive. There is insufficient information provided, in a format which parents can easily understand, to allow them to make important decisions regarding their children's health.

"Shouldn't we have a bit more information ?".

A lot of information which these parents receive is not relevant to them locally and much more could be done to improve this. Often parents do not know who to contact or how to go about contacting a particular agency or organisation. Having a leaflet with a range of relevant local and national numbers would save time and help many parents to make contact quickly with the most appropriate source of information or advice.

"When you are looking for anything, say Social Services or different things, it takes you forever to look through the phone book. The notions off you by the time you find it".

"The thing is if you've no got a phone in the house and you go down to the phone box, there's never any directories in a phone box anyway".

The Parenting Project in Angus have responded to this local need by producing a small pocket size leaflet listing the numbers and addresses of services, organisations and help lines that parents identified as being potentially useful in terms of offering additional support. The leaflet contains information about a range of local services as well as national help line numbers for those who would rather speak to someone out-with their local area. Early indications are that this resource is being used extensively and has been welcomed by parents.

Parenting Older Children

There is a general lack of support for those with older children aged ten plus. Fears about their safety and concerns about their exposure to alcohol and drugs cause a great deal of concern to many parents. A number of parents we spoke to have problems coping with adolescence and the difficulties of balancing their children's needs with their own fears and concerns. As family and parental influence decreases, peer influence increases, which can add to these tensions. In addition, many of these parents with teenage children are in full time employment which makes the provision of support a major challenge.

"You try to understand but sometimes it is a bit difficult...it's a battle of wills".

"She thinks because she is seventeen she can do what she wants".

Again these parents think that meeting with other parents going through the same thing would help enormously. They accept that this period will bring with it a new set of problems and would welcome ongoing support which took account of the various stages that children and parents go through.

"You shouldn't condemn other peoples children because you never know what yours are going to turn out like".

One of the parents summed it up by saying;

"We need support from the cradle to the rave"

A Model for Support

In terms of the main concerns and issues which the parents groups expressed at the seminar, a clear model for support emerged which was endorsed by the majority of those who attended. These parents had very clear ideas about the type of support they would like to have and the way they would like it to be structured. Such a model would be built on the following:

- **Meeting Information Needs**
  Information is a major and fundamental issue for parents and improvements in its availability, relevance and accessibility are called for.

- **Emphasise Existing Skills**
  Parents already have a range of existing skills and knowledge which must be recognised and built on.

- **Parent Groups rather than Parenting Classes**
  Providing supportive environments in which parents feel free to identify issues of concern or interest, is far more likely to be successful in terms of reaching and sustaining contact with parents. It is also less stigmatising and provides opportunities to build on existing knowledge and experience.

- **Informal Structure**
  Support should be informal and free flowing in the sense that parents actively participate and access support on a voluntary basis.

- **Defining the Agenda**
  Parents should be allowed to define their own agenda and identify their advice and information needs as required. This should be flexible enough to adapt to changing needs.

- **Learning Styles**
  Support should recognise that there are a range of different learning styles which must be acknowledged and addressed.

- **Delivery**
  A worker facilitates learning through enabling discussion and interaction. Parenting cannot be taught, but skills can be learned.

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*Right*lines is a series of short reports produced by Save the Children - Scotland Programme. *Right*lines highlights issues which affect the rights of children and young people in Scotland.

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